

The uniqueness of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies

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The paper combines intentionalist with functionalist approaches to the Nazi genocide on Gypsies, arguing for a differentiated interpretation of the processes that led to the genocide. A critical position is taken with regard to the adoption in the context of the Nazi persecution of Gypsies of the 'Jewish narrative', which is based on the intentionalist interpretation, and the idea is challenged that identical motives were behind the persecution of Jews and Gypsies.

Introduction

On Monday, 20 April 1942, after a telephone conversation with his subordinate Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the Central Office for Reich Security (RSHA), Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and a central figure in the Third Reich, noted in his diary one short sentence: *Keine Vernichtung d. Zigeuner* ('No extermination of the Gypsies'). What did Himmler mean by this sentence and what was its significance regarding Nazi policy, in view of the fact that thousands of Gypsies were exterminated by the Nazis between 20 April 1942 and the end of the Second World War?

In this article I would like to present my interpretation of this sentence, as well as new archival evidence of Nazi persecution of the Gypsies in general and of the Eastern European Roma in particular. The material was found recently in Eastern European archives. I wish to integrate these new materials in my general thesis on Nazi policy toward Gypsies which I have

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already presented in previous work (Margalit 1997, 1998, 1999). I begin with a critique of the dominant trend in the historiography of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies. My criticism pertains to its claim for identical parallelism between this persecution and the *Shoah* of European Jewry, and to the prevailing notion of racism in this trend, since racism has been presented as the similar motivation for both persecutions. I use Zimmermann's (1996) book as the source of most of the evidence I discuss, although in certain points my own interpretation of the facts is slightly different from Zimmermann's. His book is the most up-to-date and comprehensive historical research on the Nazi persecution of the European Gypsies that exists, and includes many new historical revelations previously unknown.

The Jewish narrative of the Gypsy genocide

'262,000 Romanian Gypsies were brought to the east of Poland, in accordance with Nazi instructions, and murdered there like the Jews. . . A similar fate is foreseen by the Nazis for the 300,000 Gypsies in Hungary' ('Ende der Zigeuner-Romantik', *Die Zeitung* 26 March 1943). These citations, taken from an article published in London in March 1943 in *Die Zeitung*, an anti-Nazi newspaper published by German refugees, are probably the earliest news published in the West about an extermination of Eastern European Gypsies. It was interpreted according to the information the West already possessed at that time about the extermination of the Jews in Eastern Europe, namely, Gypsies were depicted as a group likewise assigned by the Nazis for total physical extermination. Fortunately, after the war it became clear that these fears had been greatly exaggerated, and probably only between 9,000 (Zimmermann 1996: 288) and 36,000 (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 183–4) Romanian Gypsies had in fact been killed or perished, mostly during their deportation in Transnistria.

This narrative, which was designed according to the pattern of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the *Shoah*, continued to spread in the West after the war ended. Its publication in the United Kingdom and the United States shaped the collective memory of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies in the entire Western consciousness. The first comprehensive publication on the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies, by Donald Kenrick and Grattan Puxon (1972) also adopted this narrative. It depicted the persecution of the Gypsies as similar to the Nazi persecution of the Jews, according to the pattern of interpretation common at that time. Kenrick and Puxon implied that

murderous intent could be traced as early as 1933, the year Hitler won the Chancellery. They argued that already in that year an SS research group suggested loading all the Gypsies onto a ship and sinking it out at sea. This claim aimed at substantiating the argument that the Nazis intended to exterminate all German Gypsies from the very beginning.

However, this depiction is rather doubtful. There is no evidence confirming either the information itself that a certain SS group planned to exterminate all German Gypsies by drowning them, or the year 1933 as the year of the plan. Robert Ritter, the racial-hygiene expert on Gypsies, told this story only after the Second World War, during the investigation into his role in the Nazi persecution. Ritter and later his assistant, Eva Justin, stated that a plan to drown the German Gypsies in the Mediterranean was mooted in the SS's office for race issues (*Rassenpolitisches Amt*) as early as 1935. Ritter during his investigation (beginning in 1948), claimed that during the war, he himself had prevented several Nazi plans for total extermination of the Gypsies, for example by forsaking them in Russia to freeze in the snowy winter, or to drop them in the marches. Ritter used these stories during the investigation as an alibi to justify his acts during the Third Reich. He presented them as an attempt to protect the Gypsies against the intention of others to exterminate them. The reliability of these details in his testimony, and of other details which he submitted during the deposition, is somewhat dubious (Margalit 1997: 338–9).

Nevertheless, I disagree with Lewy's formalistic claim that the mass murder of Gypsies by the Nazis during the Second World War cannot be regarded as genocide in the strict sense of the term (Lewy 2000: 221–4, esp. 223; see also a critique of his concept in Zimmermann 2000: 41–3). According to Kenrick and Puxon, 219,600 Gypsies were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators all over Europe (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 183–4). Zimmermann's estimate is much lower. He claims that the victims numbered 90,000 Gypsy men, women, and children—if not more (Zimmermann 1996: 248–92). Even if we accept the lower estimate it is still to be considered as the mass murder of an ethnic group. Such an atrocity should be defined as genocide—if not in the strict legal sense then surely by the common use of the term.

Despite certain similarities between this persecution and the Nazi persecution of the Jews, I share in principle Bauer's and Lewy's explicit rejection of an historical parallelism between the two persecutions (Bauer 1998; Lewy 2000: 225), and Zimmermann's more cautious and implicit critique of such

an approach (Zimmermann 2000: 43–5). Nevertheless, it seems to me that there still remain several open questions that have not been thoroughly discussed by these historians in their recent publications. I would argue that alongside certain similarities with the *Shoah*, the persecution of the Gypsies has also certain unique features that are not to be found in the Nazi persecution of the Jews. I contest the presentation in Kenrick and Puxon's classic study (1972), and that of other historians who followed their interpretation of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies, such as Milton (1992), Friedlander (1995), and Wippermann (1997). These historians adopted the Jewish narrative of the persecution of the Gypsies, arguing that the Nazis, motivated by the same racist or racial-biological purposes, carried out exactly the same policy regarding Jews and Gypsies. I will claim that their very perception of Nazi racism is anachronistic and a-historical. They regard Nazi policy towards Gypsies as monolithic and unified, and do not distinguish between contradictory trends and ideological differences within the Nazi regime. For example, they disregard the racist romantic approach to Gypsies in the Third Reich. Friedlander, for example, following to a certain extent the ideas of the late Peukert (1982: 246–79), maintained that in their aspiration for a homogenous German society, the Nazis conducted exclusionary policies toward various groups, the so-called degenerated part of the German people such as the disabled and *Mischlinge* (people of mixed race, hybrids), and members of the so-called alien and inferior races. First, Friedlander attributes only one unified motive to the Nazi persecutions against various victims groups, in Germany as abroad. But the murder of East-European Jewry and East-European Roma who lived outside the 'Lebensraum of the German people' does not fit into this monocausal model of explanation, as it can not be explained by the Nazi aspiration for a homogenous German society. Second and most important, it seems to me that unconsciously, Friedlander and others of his school attribute to Nazi racism simply a reversed conception to their own universalistic, humanist, and egalitarian convictions. However, Nazi ideology denied and challenged the very notions of equality and unity of human race. Nazi ideology did not regard the Jew as equal or identical either to Gypsy or to a German disabled, but as an absolute 'anti-race' (*Gegenrasse*). The fact that ultimately these groups were all murdered does not prove that the Nazis had perceived them identically. Racism has never been a rigid and unified conception. Being a syncretic and eclectic perception, racial antisemitism has absorbed many traditional as well as modern antisemitic prejudices and stereotypes, exactly as did racial

antigypsyism. But, in contrast to the centrality of the alleged 'Jewish race' in European and German racism, which had derived from the centrality of Jews in the Christian and modern antisemitism, no one in the German racist movement of the nineteenth century had spoken of a 'Gypsy race' or attributed to the Gypsies an attempt to dominate Germany or the Christian world, and only few racists were preoccupied with Gypsies (Wippermann 1997: 110–15). Thus *racism* targets different groups (races) attributing to them different characteristics, even though the racists may regard them all as 'inferior'. In fact, the use of the term 'racism' with regard to Nazi attitudes toward Jews implies entirely different racial characterizations and prejudices than when the term is applied to Nazi attitudes toward Gypsies. I will elaborate on this issue in the next section.

Friedlander maintained that the most radical manifestation of exclusionary policies during the war was the killing of members of these groups: 'After they [the Gypsies] had been classified by the race scientists as racially inferior, they were killed alongside Jews' (Friedlander 1995: 21). Friedlander explicitly asserted that after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, 'Hitler and his clique of Nazi leaders had decided to implement a final solution [physical extermination] for both Jews and Gypsies' (1995: 262; similar interpretations are given by Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 81). Friedlander neglects to mention that there is no evidence whatsoever to substantiate his conjectures regarding an alleged decision by Hitler to physically exterminate all Gypsies. As early as 1935 certain Nazi circles and certain officials in the German state fantasized over a quite radical exclusionary solution to the 'Gypsy problem': sterilization. Nonetheless, no evidence exists that Hitler himself or the Nazi leadership decided on a final solution of the Gypsies at any stage during the war, even though the persecution ultimately turned into a genocide. In fact, the historical evidence calls for an alternative explanation, which retains certain intentionalist elements but also carries certain functionalist elements. Attention must be drawn to some elements unique to Nazi policy towards Gypsies, which are totally absent from the Jewish case. The fact that we have Hitler's authorization to the Euthanasia of October 1939, and that we have certain circumstantial indications for his giving consent to mass killings of Jews sometime between late summer and early winter 1941, does not yet prove that Hitler had given authorization for the killing of Gypsies. Friedlander interpreted exclusionary measures taken by the Nazi regime against the German Gypsies from 1941 as stages of realization of a supposed decision and intention by Hitler to annihilate the Gypsies, which culminated

in their deportation to the Auschwitz concentration camp in 1943 (1995: 290 f.). Measures that do not conform to the so-called intentionalist pattern (see below), such as the exemption of the so-called 'pure racial Sinti and Lalleri' from deportation to Auschwitz, are defined as exceptions which do not change the basic pattern of his interpretation (Friedlander 1995: 292 ff.).

In the historiography of the Jewish Holocaust interpretations resembling Friedlander's explanation are called intentionalist. Such explanations take the murder of the various victims as a direct outcome and realization of Hitler's ideological murderous intention. It assumes that at a certain moment during the war Hitler decided to realize his murderous intention, which received the code name 'final solution', and the entire Nazi system implemented his decision. During the 1970s another historical school, called the functionalist or structuralist, emerged in the research of the Jewish Holocaust. The new school emphasized the centrality of non-ideological factors in the decision-making process that led to the physical extermination of the Jews during the war. Its proponents claimed that struggles for power and prestige among prominent Nazi leaders and functionaries, and various problems in the pursuit of their policies, caused them to radicalize the policy toward their victims. Thus it was not just ideological positions which brought about the realization of certain utopian ideas that had previously existed only as obscure notions, but never as concrete plans intended to be implemented.

I wish to challenge the trend of intentionalist parallelism in the historiography on the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies, and argue for a more complex interpretation of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies. I support an analysis which integrates alongside intentionalist elements also functionalist elements, as practiced in the past twenty years in the research of the Jewish *Shoah*. At the same time I call for a more intricate perception of Nazi racism in particular and of racism in general.

An identical motive for the two Nazi persecutions?

In order to draw similarities between the two persecutions, that of Gypsies and that of Jews, Kenrick and Puxon have on the one hand downplayed the political and antisemitic character of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and on the other hand highlighted the racist motives common to both persecutions. The limited framework of this article prevents me from elaborating on the different places that Jewish and Gypsy issues occupied in the Nazi

ideology and agenda, but I will try to present briefly the similarities and the differences between the Nazi motives for these two persecutions. Kenrick and Puxon maintain that the same racist motives were the causes for both persecutions. They substantiate this claim by citing, in Chapter 4 of their book, passages from various Nazi authors, such as the racist expert Hans F. K. Günther, positing that these two peoples (Jews and Gypsies) were the only non-Aryan groups in Europe (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 59). Günther was indeed a key Nazi expert on racial biology, but he was certainly not the ideological authority of the Third Reich. The ideological as well as the political authority in that regime was Adolf Hitler. Hitler's *Weltanschauung* (world-view), which had shaped Nazi ideology, had more components than racism. Antisemitism constituted a basic element, if not the basic element, of Nazism. Therefore Hitler's ideas and perceptions on Jews and Gypsies and certainly the ideas of the head of the SS and the German police, Heinrich Himmler, exerted much more influence on Nazi policies on these two groups than Günther's racial-biological perceptions.

Racial biology undeniably played a part in both persecutions, as it generally did in the Nazi *Weltanschauung* and in Nazi politics toward various peoples. However, one cannot reduce Nazi antisemitism to a mere sort of racism. Racism was a brand-new pseudo-scientific belief, first appearing in the second half of nineteenth century. Nazi racial antisemitism consisted of a mixture of that new doctrine (racism) and the modern antisemitism, which had crystallized into a political ideology as early as the 1840s. The involvement of certain prominent Jews in European politics and the economy (the Rothschilds are the most renowned example) contributed to the identification in Europe of Jews with the chaotic modern capitalist order (the so-called Manchesterism), especially with its malice. This new negative image of the Jew as a rich capitalist and as an oppressor of the Christian masses also took in the evil character already attributed to the Jews in traditional Christian antisemitism, even though Nazi antisemitism is essentially distinct from Christian antisemitism. Modern antisemites had accused all Jews of being part of a world conspiracy aimed at dominating the entire Christian world. Such accusations pertained to Jews only, and were missing in any European or German racial concepts applied to any other allegedly 'inferior' race or people such as Slavs, Africans, or Gypsies.

Since their arrival into the sphere of German culture, Gypsies were generally not welcomed. Positive attitudes toward them were probably shared only by a minority of the Germans. But although traditional attitudes

toward them were usually negative, and although they were depicted as *Asoziale*, thieves and fraudsters, a romantic Gypsy image had always prevailed in German culture. In contrast to the high degree of uniformity of negative Nazi attitudes and policies toward Jews and the almost total lack of any romantic Nazi view regarding even a small group of Jews, Nazi approaches and policies toward Gypsies had integrated two traditional, contradictory attitudes with racism and racial hygienic concepts. Alongside the dominant racial antigypsyism, which aimed at a removal of Gypsies from Germany, one could also find a racist romantic trend, which had influenced Himmler's policy toward Gypsies in 1942–3.

The Nazis, being influenced by modern antisemitism, considered the Jew not only a menace to the racial purity of the German *Volk*, as they did the German Gypsies, but mainly a total and universal enemy: one that had conspired against Germany by mobilizing both international communism and Western plutocracy against it. This perception of Jews played a much greater role than pure racist concepts in the Nazi 'Jewish policy'. As a result, Hitler and the Nazi elite became obsessed with Jews and Judaism, and dictated a unified antisemitic policy that no one in the party dared to challenge. The 'Jewish question' was viewed as a key political issue and occupied a central place (if not the central place) on the Nazi agenda and in Nazi world politics.

On 30 January 1939, in a speech at the Reichstag, Hitler voiced his threat: 'If the international Jewish financiers inside and outside Europe should again succeed in plunging the nations into another world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevization of the world, and thus a victory for Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe' (Domarus 1965: 1057–8). Hitler defined the war of annihilation he waged against the Soviet Union as a war against Judeo-Bolshevism. He truly believed that Jews actually dominated Russia and propagated Bolshevism as a means to realize their scheme of Jewish world domination. 'Solving the Jewish problem' was made a matter of the highest priority, becoming the most total persecution perpetrated by Nazi Germany during Second World War, even though in numbers Germans murdered far more Soviet citizens during that war (25 million, about a third of whom were soldiers and about two thirds were civilians) than Jews (Weinberg 1994: 894). Even when writing his 'political testament' on 29 April 1945 one day before he committed suicide, Hitler still blamed the Jews for instigating the war and inflicting violent death on millions of Aryan men, women and children in Europe, as well as for his own failure and defeat. Hitler stated that the Jew was 'being made to atone for his guilt,

though by more humane methods'. Hitler therefore perceived his policy of extermination of the Jews as an act of German retaliation against international Jewish financiers who had allegedly plunged the nations into a world war. This belief is a clear expression of antisemitic views. Antisemitic ideology was therefore the main motive for the Nazi annihilation of European Jewry—not racial biological concerns to preserve the racial purity of the Germans.

Now we must turn to the parallel question: what place did the 'Gypsy problem' occupy on the Nazi agenda? The number of Gypsies—around 20,000 in Germany before their destruction by the Third Reich, compared with approximately 500,000 Jews—was of course much smaller, as was their prominence in German cultural, economic, social, and political life. Unlike the case of Jews and Judaism, which greatly engaged Nazi thinkers and politicians, references to the Gypsies in the writings, speeches, and discussions of the leading Nazi figures (Hitler, Goebbels, Himmler) and in Nazi propaganda were extremely sparse. In sharp contrast to his obsessive preoccupation with Jews, both in private and in public, Hitler referred only twice to Gypsies in his Table Talks, and he never once talked about them in public. Hitler's few remarks about the Gypsies reflected an anti-Gypsyism which was not always racist. In May 1940, Hitler indeed determined that the Gypsies were foreigners and had to be treated like the Jews. But in a conversation with Heydrich in 1941, Hitler described the Gypsies in terms of their traditional negative image, as thieves and frauds who were a nuisance to the rural population. 'The Gypsies are romantic', Hitler stated, 'only in the bars of Budapest'.¹

The Nazi preoccupation with Gypsies lacked the political aspect that characterized the Nazi position towards the Jews. Neither German nor Eastern European Gypsies were ever regarded by the Nazis as the political enemies of Germany as the Jews were. The Nazi policy on the German Gypsies had never been pure-racial, either. But it had always contained a racial hygienic aspect which was missing from the Nazi treatment of German Jews. In a recommendation letter to the DFG (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, the German Research Society) on Ritter's researches of December 1939, Paul Werner, Nebe's deputy in the criminal police (RKPA), defined the nature of 'the Gypsy problem': 'The Gypsy problem is now a most urgent part to be treated, of the entire social problem. This is indeed mainly a racial problem, but in its practical effect it is mostly a problem of *Asoziale*'.² Within the Reich's boundaries, the German bureaucracy regarded the 'Gypsy question'

as an integral part of what it defined as a 'social problem', for the *Volks-gemeinschaft* (the German national community), however, not as a political or existential problem. Most German Gypsies were stigmatized as 'asocial elements' who allegedly lived like parasites off German toil (by committing crimes or receiving welfare benefits). From 1935, the criminal idea that sterilization might provide a 'solution' to this 'problem' was aired among German officials (Margalit 1998: 406–7). In her dissertation, Ritter's assistant, Eva Justin, established that so far the 'Gypsy problem' is not to be compared with the 'Jewish problem', as the 'Gypsy breed' (*Zigeunerart*) in contrast to the Jewish intellectuals (*jüdische Intelligenz*) could not undermine or endanger the German people (Zimmermann 1996: 372–3).

Even when Gypsies and Jews were treated similarly, during the Second World War, as, for example, by the *Wehrmacht* in Serbia, in the Fall of 1941, Hitler's generals distinguished the two peoples. In a highly secret circular issued by General Turner, the authorized commissioner in conquered Serbia, late in October 1941, he ordered the incarceration of Jewish and Roma hostages, who would be executed in the event of any partisan attack on German troops. After maintaining that, generally, both Jews and Gypsies are an unreliable element and therefore constituted a danger to public order and security, Turner supplied a purely antisemitic explanation for taking these measures against the Jews: 'the Jewish intellectuals provoked the war, and must be exterminated (*vernichtet*)'. However, his explanation for choosing the Gypsies as hostages seemed to be racist. He claimed that 'due to their external and internal structure they cannot be a useful member of a community of peoples (*Völkergemeinschaft*)'. He asserted that the 'Jewish element considerably participated in the leadership of the [partisan] bands, while the Gypsies are responsible for atrocities and espionage'. Clearly, for Turner the Jews played the major role in the international conspiracy against Germany while the Gypsies played only a subordinate part.³

No uniformly negative attitudes or opposition to Gypsy culture emerged even among the SS members, who formed the ideological spearhead of Nazism. Almost every week for over two years (March 1938–May 1940), the SS organ, *Das Schwarze Korps*, carried an advertisement for the Gypsy Cellar (*Zigeunerkeller*) which operated in Café Vienna in Berlin. The advertisement was decorated by a figure of a Gypsy violinist dressed in Hungarian costume. The café offered daily concerts of 'Gypsy' music, in the afternoons and evenings. The contents of the advertisement did not clarify whether the musicians were indeed Gypsies. However, it is hard to imagine the official

SS journal carrying a similar advertisement for a Jewish cellar (*Judenkeller*) in which *Klezmer* music (typical East European Jewish music) were played.

To sum up, compared with the centrality of the 'Jewish question' on the Nazi agenda as a major political issue in the Third Reich, the 'Gypsy question' was much less evident. One might even assert that it occupied only a marginal position. It lacked the political dimension and was regarded as part of the 'social problem' in Germany.

Nazi policy on the German Gypsies

From 1933, Gypsies who lived in the German Reich were exposed to unprecedented discrimination and harassment on local level as well as the national level, although these measures were not uniformly and universally enforced (Zimmermann 1996: 79–162). Nevertheless, there were no anti-Gypsy parallels to the public antisemitic campaigns and riots launched against the German Jews in the early years of the Third Reich, such as the boycott on Jewish businesses declared on 1 April 1933 or the notorious pogrom of 9 November 1938, known as *Reichskristallnacht*. Kenrick and Puxon's presentation of the promulgation of the racial law's at Nuremberg in September 1935 holds that German Gypsies, like German Jews, were deprived of their German citizenship (Kenrick and Puxon 1972: 59). This interpretation is far from accurate. The whole context of Hitler's presentation of the Nuremberg Laws to the Reichstag's plenary in 15 September 1935 (before Göring read out the official acts), was exclusively antisemitic. Both the so-called Reich Citizen Law (*Reichsbürgergesetz*), and the 'Law for preservation of the German blood and German dignity' pertained to Jews only, and not to Gypsies or other alien races. Only on 26 November 1935 did the Ministry of Interior extend the ban against Jews marrying Aryans to Gypsies and blacks (*Neger*) (Wippermann 1997: 150–2). The Jews were denied legal status as German citizens through the enactment of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. Despite the explicit provision by Stukart and Globke's commentary of the racial Laws, which formally likened the status of the Gypsies to that of the Jews, as both were regarded as carriers of foreign blood, officially the Gypsies continued to hold their citizenship status (of *Reichsbürger*) until the twelfth directive on the Reich's citizenship law of April 1943, regardless of their racial impurity (Zimmermann 1996: 161). However, many of them were deprived of certain civil rights, such as the right to vote for the Reichstag, for receiving welfare grants, or to move freely.

Directives issued in November 1937 by the Reich's Ministry of the Interior and the War Ministry, which explicitly stated that Gypsies may not serve in the military, were disregarded, and several hundred young German Sinti were conscripted to the *Wehrmacht* when the war broke out in 1939. An ex-*Wehrmacht* soldier, Walter Winter, recalled that at least 500 of the inmates in the Gypsy camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau were former *Wehrmacht* soldiers (Winter 1999: 68). Hitler was informed of this only in May 1940, by his assistant for *Wehrmacht* issues. This information upset him, and he stated that the Gypsies were a foreign element (*artfremd*) and that they should be treated according to a special law (*Ausnahmegesetz*) which applied to Jews, who were no longer permitted to be enlisted for military service. Hitler claimed that Himmler had been given clear instructions about how to handle the Gypsies. But Hitler's order was not carried out in full until the beginning of 1943. Most Gypsies continued to serve in the *Wehrmacht* until 1942–3, when they were discharged, in many cases only several months after the decrees ordering them to be discharged had been issued (Zimmermann 1996: 195–8). In most cases the *Wehrmacht* authorities were aware that these soldiers were Gypsies. For example, as late as March 1942 the Sinto Walter Winter could remain with his naval unit, but as a Gypsy he was not entitled to rank or promotion (Winter 1999: 29–34, esp. 33). He preferred to leave the navy. The *Wehrmacht* behaved similarly toward Jewish *Mischlinge* since the *Wehrmacht's* leadership was reluctant to release soldiers from service as the situation at the front became more and more disastrous. However, in the course of the war the *Wehrmacht* had hardened its ideological position regarding the military service of Jewish *Mischlinge* and many were discharged. For sure no *Mischlinge* were re-drafted for military service. What is unique regarding to military service of German Sinti soldiers in German combat units during Second World War is that several hundred Gypsy ex-*Wehrmacht* soldiers who were released from service in 1941–1942, and deported to Auschwitz, were re-drafted in the winter of 1945 into an SS combat unit, the Dirlwanger unit, and fought on the Oder front against the Red Army (Winter 1999).

The turning point in the Gypsy policy of the Third Reich was not 1933, as in the Jewish case, but rather 1936. That year, as a part of the re-organization process known as the *Gleichschaltung*, an institutional infrastructure that became the Reich's 'Center for Combating the Gypsy Nuisance' was established within the Reich's criminal police. The creation of the new body enabled to control Gypsies within the Reich. From then on, the authorities

began to take measures against the Gypsies that were unprecedented in modern German history. From June 1936, the treatment of Gypsies was regulated at the national level. Gypsies were ordered to be settled in one place, a step never taken in the past. As early as 1935, local initiatives were made in several German cities to concentrate all the Gypsies who lodged or were settled within their jurisdiction in one location and to place them under guard. In these camps the Gypsies were prohibited from engaging in their traditional occupations and they were set to work in forced labor in construction and in factories. They were also denied welfare and child support, as they were stigmatized as anti-social elements (Zimmermann 1996: 93–100). Measures against Gypsies also began to take on a more overtly racist tone. In a circular of June 1936 they were defined as ‘the Gypsy people who are foreign to the German people’ (Zimmermann 1996: 89–90).

In 1936 Dr. Robert Ritter, a psychiatrist from Tübingen, became the head of ‘Racial Hygiene and Biology of the Population Research Unit’, which operated in the Reich’s Ministry of Health. Ritter’s reports indicate that the Interior Ministry authorized his institute speedily to promote the ‘clarification’ of the problem of the *Asoziale* who included the Gypsies, ‘in order to investigate whether through preventing [reproduction of] offspring infected with hereditary diseases, the restriction of the increase lately occurring in the *Asoziale* and criminals might be achieved’. The Ministry of the Interior aimed to expand the sterilization law of July 1933 (intended to prevent reproduction of offspring suffering from hereditary diseases) to include the Gypsy *Mischlinge* who were defined as *Asoziale*.⁴

In 1937, teams from Ritter’s institute started to collect data on Gypsies all over Germany. They were aided by the Reich’s criminal police and by the newly created center for combating the Gypsy nuisance. The study was intended to allow classification of the Gypsy population according to its social value, and thus to assist policy-making. Plans were drawn up for a special law concerning the Gypsies, regulating their treatment, but in the end no such law was enacted (Zimmermann 1996: 156–62). In December 1938, influenced by Ritter’s activity, Himmler, then commander of the German police, issued a circular containing a clear racist element.

Ritter provided the Nazi regime with a theory about the Gypsies which combined racism with the concept termed *Asozialität* by the Germans. This was the propensity of certain people to show an indifferent attitude towards society by quitting the productive sector of society and becoming dependent on welfare despite their being healthy and capable of working to support

themselves and their families. During the 1930s this perceived propensity started increasingly to be viewed as inherited malice. Ritter argued that hardly any of the Gypsies were pure nomads of Indian origin, but were '*Mischlinge* of different descent and races' (Ritter 1938: 77; Ritter 1941: 481). The *asoziale* properties which he claimed were prevalent among those who conducted a Gypsy way of life were, he said, a consequence of mixing Gypsy blood with that of disreputable elements in German society. Ritter argued that most of the so-called 'Gypsies' were in fact *Asoziale Mischlinge* and that there were no longer any truly 'pure-race' Gypsies left in Europe. As he believed that the *Asoziale* were a hopeless case, and could not be integrated into the respectable and productive social circles, he recommended as early as 1935 an examination of whether the solution of the *Asoziale* problem was to prevent reproduction through sterilization, as in the case of retarded people. Ritter and some bureaucrats of the Interior Ministry wished to expand the use of sterilization as a preventive social treatment beyond the populations for which the 1933 law had been designed. The practical effect behind his suggestion to sterilize the *Asoziale* among the German Gypsies would be to eliminate most German Gypsies in one generation. This is certainly a genocidal goal.

With regard to the 'pure-race' Gypsies, Ritter held that they should be allowed to continue their traditional lifestyle and customs, as these constituted no danger to the German people. Ritter determined that a small core of the Sinte were 'pure-race' (*Reinrassige*); alternatively, he used the term 'Gypsies of genuine Gypsy tribes' (*stammechte Zigeuner*). In various places in his writings Ritter determined that the term 'pure-race', which he used with regard to the Sinti, was a useful term, not referring to the notion of racial purity in its most accurate sense, because, according to him, no 'pure-race' Gypsies were left in Europe. Nazi anthropologists regarded all the Gypsies as 'an Oriental Near-Eastern' (*Vorderasien*) mixture of races', like the Jews.

Ritter's wish to keep for himself a small group of Gypsies for research purposes was probably behind his quasi-scientific distinction between the 'positive' and 'negative' elements in Gypsyhood. Not by chance, Ritter attributed the pure element in Gypsies to the core of the German Gypsies, not to the Roma, and bestowed upon them a privileged status in relation to other Gypsy groups, as if they were Aryans. Ritter classified the Gypsies on physical characteristics such as skeleton, physical structure, hair and eye color, and cultural ones such as mastery of the Romany language, degree of

strictness about upholding traditional customs, and the extent of 'traveling impulse' (*Wandertrieb*).

Gypsies who either racially or culturally did not match the ideal type of the pure Gypsy, were immediately stigmatized not only as *Mischlinge* but as *Asoziale*. In 1935, before he had even started to conduct his studies, Ritter determined that only about ten percent of the Gypsies were real Gypsies. Ritter's research findings from 1937 on apparently substantiated his hypothesis. In 1941 Ritter completed his primary survey; thereafter he aimed to complete his analysis of all the Gypsies in the Reich, a task he did not manage to complete in full. Note that even the pseudo-scientific reason that Ritter produced for sterilizing the Gypsies and denying them their freedom had not been their Gypsy essence, but rather their *Asozialität*, which they inherited from their (antisocial) German ancestors. While the Nazis regarded the 'racially pure Jew' as the ultimate evil, being influenced by the Aryan myth, the 'racially pure Gypsy' was not deemed by Ritter a menace to the German people. He claimed that only the *Mischlinge* (who, according to his research, constituted the majority of German Gypsies), the product of the mixing of Gypsy blood with that of German asocial elements, might endanger the health of German people.

Ritter's recommendations that most German Gypsies be sterilized and incarcerated and only a small number be allowed to remain free, met the expectations of the Interior Ministry, which, as stated, had authorized him to perform the research. They hoped that sterilization could also be used more widely to solve the problem of all the *Asoziale*. These expectations reflected the wish prevalent among the Nazi leadership to see a complete and radical solution to the 'Gypsy problem' in the Reich's domain, as a part of a larger utopian vision of purifying the German nation of low-value elements.

There is no explicit evidence that the Nazis intended to exterminate the Gypsies prior to 1942. While in 1938 the SS discussed sterilization and incarceration as a 'solution', by 1940 Himmler and Heydrich wanted to deport all Gypsies without distinction between *Mischlinge* and 'pure race' to the *Generalgouvernement* in Poland (the part of occupied Poland which was not annexed to the German Reich). After the first 2,330 Gypsies were deported from the Reich to Poland in May 1940, this initiative was stopped due to the opposition of Hans Frank, the Governor-General. He said the deportation of Gypsies was to be postponed until the Jewish problem had been solved. Ritter,⁵ as well as Leonardo Conti, the Reich's secretary for health issues and

head of the Reich's physicians' organization, opposed the deportation of German Gypsies to Poland. Both advocated sterilization as the only means to deal with the problem effectively (Zimmermann 1996 : 159, 171).

The outbreak of the war and the extermination of the Jews contributed to the radicalization of opinion among the Nazi upper ranks about how best to 'solve' the Gypsy problem. In 1941 Heydrich suggested to include the *Asoziale* in the Euthanasia program (killing of German handicapped). It is likely that he also supported such treatment for the Gypsies, who were regarded by the criminal police and the bureaucracy as an integral part of the *Asoziale*. In September 1942 Joseph Goebbels stated, in a conversation with the Minister of Justice, Otto Thierack, that the '*Asoziale* life of Jews and Gypsies has simply to be exterminated' (Zimmermann 1996 : 300). As mentioned above, Ritter assigned this label of *Asoziale* to most of the Gypsies in Germany. Goebbels and Thierack found the racist distinction between *Mischlinge* and 'pure race' Gypsies meaningless.

The Nazi racist-romantic approach to Gypsies

There was a different and more complex approach to the German Gypsies, which did not undergo a process of Nazi radicalization. This approach was typical of *Deutsches Ahnenerbe* ('German forefathers' heritage'), an institution established by Himmler within the SS for the purpose of investigating the ancient Germanic past. This approach took a romantic view of Gypsies, and was opposed to the position of those who wanted their physical extermination. From the end of the nineteenth century, the romantic stream had been the least dominant within German racist thinking about the Gypsies. The antisemitic agitator Houston Stuart Chamberlain held the genial musical gift of the Gypsies to be a typical expression of an Aryan essence. It seemed that he was more interested in Romany culture than in the physical appearance of Gypsies which differed from his Aryan ideals (Chamberlain 1906: Vol. 2, 1165 n. 1; 1168).

The *Ahnenerbe's* ideologists had access to Himmler, the founder of the institution, and the leading player conducting the 'Gypsy policy' of the Third Reich, who was imparted to the *Ahnenerbe's* romantic concepts regarding the German Gypsies. This had some influence on Nazi policy towards the Gypsies during 1942-3. In those years, Himmler's Gypsy policy combined Ritter's exclusionary concepts with the romantic notions of the *Ahnenerbe*. Ritter's research was used by Himmler as a pseudo-scientific

foundation for his policy, although Ritter himself opposed the racial romanticization of the Gypsies. Like Ritter, most of the Nazi functionaries who referred in some way or other to the Gypsies attributed no significance to the Aryan myth. Hitler and Rosenberg, for example, did not regard the Indians as Aryans, and therefore opposed their struggle for independence. Whereas Himmler officially headed the bodies which dealt with the German Gypsies (the criminal police and the concentration camps' administration), the influence of the *Ahnenerbe's* romantic perceptions had apparently influenced actual Nazi policy. Himmler used only certain elements of Ritter's theory, and combined them with some romantic elements.

The Nazi policy toward East-European Roma

The war against the Soviet Union was launched on 22 June 1941. In late summer that year, in occupied Serbia, several hundred Gypsy men were taken hostage together with Jewish men, and were executed in reprisal for partisan attacks on German soldiers (Zimmermann 1996: 250 ff.).

Reports of the *Einsatzgruppen* operating in the rear of the advancing *Wehrmacht* units, in the German-occupied territories in the Soviet Union, indicate that in late August 1941 the firing squads of these troops began to execute Gypsies (Zimmermann 1996: 259 ff.). We do not know of any specific order to exterminate Gypsies, but it seems that certain commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* interpreted Hitler's 'Commissars Order' (an order to kill political commissars of the Red Army as well any other elements who might endanger the security in the occupied territories of the Soviet Union), as pertaining also to the extermination of Gypsies. *Einsatzgruppen* A, B, and C did not search out Gypsies systematically, but nevertheless 3,500 Gypsies were murdered in the Baltic states. *Einsatzgruppe* D, which was active in the Crimean Peninsula, murdered between 2,000 and 2,400 Gypsies in 1941–2 (Zimmermann 1996: 262–4). During the *Einsatzgruppen* trial at Nuremberg in 1948 Otto Ohlendorf, the commander of *Einsatzgruppe* D, claimed that the assignment of these troops was to keep the occupied Soviet territories free of subversive elements, by the killing of Jews, Gypsies, communist functionaries, and anyone who might threaten security. He asserted that past experience had shown that the Gypsies had always been active as spies, like the Jews (Zimmermann 1996: 261). Another SS general, Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, stated at the Nuremberg trials that the killing of the Gypsies was part of the assignment of the *Einsatzgruppen*.⁶

Ohlendorf's line of defense was that he and the other commanders of the *Einsatzgruppen* had received a general order to murder Jews and Gypsies even before the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union. This apologetic claim originated from his desperate attempt to escape the death penalty for his crimes (Ohlendorf did not succeed and was hanged in Nuremberg). He thought he might get a milder sentence if he could only prove that the mass killings he had ordered were the implementation of a superior's order and not his own initiative. Ohlendorf's claim could not be substantiated by historical research (Streim 1987). The first murder of Gypsies by gas took place at Chelmno in January 1942. The victims were Gypsies from the Austrian Burgenland who had been deported to Łódź ghetto and had survived the epidemics and the hunger there (Zimmermann 1996: 203).

Parallel to his racist-romantic perceptions regarding the German Sinti, Himmler seemingly also took a more moderate approach than his Nazi colleagues to the Roma in Eastern Europe than his colleagues. He apparently did not wish systematically to exterminate them all. As mentioned at the start of this article, on 20 April 1942 Himmler noted in his diary 'No extermination of the Gypsies' (*Keine Vernichtung d. Zigeuner*) following a telephone conversation with Reinhard Heydrich, the head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. I interpret this as an expression of his objection to the murder of Gypsies by the *Einsatzgruppen* from the start of the war against the Soviet Union. I disagree with Zimmermann's assumption that this note referred to the release of 292 Roma women and children from the camp in Semlin near Belgrade in Yugoslavia, where they had been incarcerated together with Jewish women and children (Zimmermann 2000: 45 ff.). The Roma women and children had already been released at the beginning of March 1942 when a special gas wagon was sent from Berlin to gas all the Jewish inmates in that camp (Manoschek 1995: 178). I see no reason why Himmler should have discussed this particular decision with Heydrich a month and a half after it had been implemented. In my view Himmler's note reflects a universal perception he held at that time. I do find a direct connection between this note and the directive Himmler issued to the Security Police (*Sicherheitspolizei*) and Order Police (*Ordnungspolizei*) in occupied Poland some months later, in August 1942. Himmler stated that those units should not take steps against Gypsies merely because they were 'Gypsies'. Measures should be taken only against Gypsies who participated in criminal activities or who collaborated with the partisans.⁷ Contrary to the 'common-sense' approach of Ohlendorf and Bach-Zelewski, which

condemned thousands of Roma to death, Himmler believed they should be spared from the total extermination he designed for the entirety of European Jewry.

Himmler's orders regarding the East-European Roma in fact reflected a position which was the reverse of that taken towards the German Gypsies. In the East it was the vagrant Gypsies who were perceived as an element to be exterminated, rather than the permanently settled Gypsies. In Germany, as noted above, Ritter held the opposite position. Himmler's directives saved many of the East-European Roma in the German-occupied territories from total annihilation. In comparison with the almost total extermination of the Polish Jewry (three million killed), Polish Roma were proportionally less affected by Nazi extermination. About 8,000 Polish Gypsies out of 20,000 were murdered (Zimmermann 1996: 283).

The so-called pure-race Sinti

In October 1942, without consulting Hitler, Himmler issued a decree ordering that 'the pure-race Sinti' (*reinrassige Sinte-Zigeuner*) in the German Reich be granted freedom of movement, which would enable them 'to roam in a certain area, to live according to their customs and habits, and to continue with their unique occupations'. Himmler determined in the decree that only Gypsies of unblemished behavior (*einwandfrei*) should be considered. In this decree, contrary to Ritter's attitude (Ritter opposed mixing Gypsy *Mischlinge* with 'pure-race'), Himmler ordered that 'Gypsy *Mischlinge* who are good with regard to their Gypsyhood' be joined with the clans (*Sippe*) of the 'pure' Sinti, so that they might be integrated into the Sinti group, provided the Sinti did not oppose their joining. The Gypsy men were designated to serve in a special unit of the *Wehrmacht* (Zimmermann 1996: 297–9).

Himmler's thinking on the Gypsies was racial-mystical, while Ritter's attitudes derived from the field of racial hygiene. Himmler was accordingly less strict than Ritter with regard to the mixing of *Mischlinge* with 'pure-race'. According to the data of the criminal police of November 1942, out of about 18,000 Gypsies in Germany the 'pure-race' numbered 1,079, while the 'Gypsy *Mischlinge* who were more Gypsy than German', numbered 6,992 persons. Because the issue was not the merging of the two categories but rather integrating the *Mischlinge* into the 'pure' tribes, apparently only a few out of this pool of *Mischlinge* could have joined the 'pure' tribes. After the war Ritter estimated that the number of 'pure' Gypsies did not exceed 4,000.

Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, reported in his diary that the two 'pure-race' Gypsy tribes were intended for settlement on Lake Neussiedle—namely, Sopron in the district of Oedenburg in Hungary—and would enjoy some freedom of movement. Zimmermann claims that they were to stay in a reservation in the *Generalgouvernement* in Poland (Zimmermann 1996: 300).

This plan was opposed by Martin Bormann, who headed the Nazi Party's Chancellorship. The *Reichsleiter* protested against it in a letter to Himmler early in December 1942, having chanced to hear of it from Arthur Nebe, the head of the criminal police (Kripo). 'Special treatment of those who were called pure-race Gypsies will constitute a significant deviation from the measures taken for combating the Gypsy nuisance, and it will in no way be accepted with understanding among the population or in the Party's corridors', wrote Bormann. He added, 'the Führer too will not allow the old liberties to be returned to part of the Gypsies'.⁸

In December 1942 Himmler, Hitler and Bormann met to discuss the issue. A comment by the Minister of Justice, Thierack, in his notebook, makes clear that at the meeting Himmler succeeded in persuading Hitler and Bormann to accept his policy, explaining that there were valuable racial elements among the Gypsies (Zimmermann 1996: 300). What might explain Hitler's change of mind was Himmler's argument that there was a distinction between the *Mischlinge* and the 'racially pure', and this suggested the exclusion of the romantic layer of the Gypsy image from the hated aspects of Gypsyhood. The romantic perception of the Gypsy was embedded in the collective German consciousness. This romanticism might even have been attractive to Hitler, especially as Himmler's plan was intended only to preserve a small and limited number of German Gypsies. Ritter's distinction between Gypsy *Mischlinge* and 'pure-race' Gypsies apparently corresponded to a hidden desire to single out in Gypsyism the elements that charmed the Germans and other Europeans. In the German classics these elements were expressed in the images of the Gypsy dancing girl and the Gypsy violinist.

In January 1943 Himmler issued a circular ordering the deportation of the Reich's Gypsies to a special families' camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Some categories exempt from deportation included the 'pure-race' among the Sinti and the small Lalleri tribe (which in fact was culturally closer to the East-European Roma tribes than to the Sinti), in accordance with Ritter's approach. The circular also exempted categories contrary to Ritter's perception, thus increasing the number of Gypsies allowed to remain free beyond

the range Ritter had recommended. Among the exempt categories were 'high-quality Gypsy *Mischlinge*', Gypsies married to Germans, and those who were socially integrated (the decree determined that the criminal police, not Ritter, would establish the extent of their integration). Another exempted category were Gypsy soldiers still not discharged, or those released after fighting in the war and who had been injured or awarded medals. But the decree established that all those who were exempt from deportation would be obliged to sign their willingness to be voluntarily sterilized (Zimmermann 1996: 301–4).

Himmler's racist perception of the Gypsies was therefore not as harsh as that of other Nazi leaders and functionaries. His policy was a highly radical version of a combination of two fundamentally traditional trends within German society, namely anti-Gypsyism and the romantic attitude towards the Gypsies. The racist nature of the Third Reich had to provide both trends with a racist rationalization. As both German and Nazi anthropology had never considered the Gypsies as an Aryan race, even though they spoke a language of Aryan origin, the *Ahnenerbe* researchers provided reasons prevalent in the romantic–racial current as grounds for their romantic attitude.

However, the actual implementation of the instructions in Himmler's circular, and the treatment in practice of the Gypsies in Auschwitz, are consistent with the functionalist theories about the processes which led to the extermination of the Jews. They indicate that some kind of anarchy prevailed in the various power centers of the Nazi policracy, and that Himmler did not succeed in enforcing his policy on his subservient ranks. The criminal-police stations throughout the Reich were responsible for carrying out the deportation. But whether because they wished to get rid of the Gypsies under their jurisdiction, or whether they lacked racial-hygienic opinions concerning part of the Gypsies, they did not strictly follow the circular's instructions concerning exemption from deportation to Auschwitz. In the vast majority of cases they did not distinguish 'pure-race' from Gypsy *Mischlinge*, and only a few Gypsies were allowed to stay in Germany, most of them under police control. Many of these were sterilized, and they were not allowed to move freely or engage in their traditional occupations (Zimmermann 1996: 305–15).

There is no evidence that in 1943 the SS planned to exterminate the Gypsies who were deported from Germany and some other countries to Auschwitz, as was the clear intention in the case of the Final Solution for the Jews who were deported there, although theoretically Roma and Sinti

Mischlinge were included among the deported, and according to Ritter's theory they were *Asoziale* and had to be sterilized. However, according to Goebbels's and Thierack's perception they probably had to be exterminated. Rudolf Höss, the commander of Auschwitz concentration camp, argued that they were incarcerated in Auschwitz to be held there until the end of the war. Perry Broad of the political department at the Auschwitz concentration camp received explicit instructions from Berlin that the Gypsies were not to be treated like the Jews when they arrived (that is, they were not to be exterminated). Indeed, until 1944, when a decision was taken to eliminate the Gypsy camp, the Gypsy inmates there were not killed by gas. The only exceptions were two transports of 1,700 Gypsies that arrived at Auschwitz in March 1943 from Białystok, and a transport of 1,035 Gypsies from Austria that arrived at Auschwitz in May 1943. Both were gassed, allegedly because they were infected with typhus (Zimmermann 1996: 337).

During 1943, Himmler probably lost almost all interest in the fate of the Gypsies. The influence of Himmler's wishes on what took place on the ground in the camps became limited, even though the system was directly subordinated to him, especially regarding the appalling conditions which prevailed in the camps from 1943 on. Different needs and interests of local-level functionaries may well have been the cause for the frustration of the leadership's intentions. Conditions for Gypsies worsened considerably, and soon the crowded accommodations, the poor hygiene conditions, the miserable nutrition, and Dr. Mengele's sadistic torture dressed up as 'medical experiments' led to the outbreak of epidemics, and many of the incarcerated Gypsies died as a result. As noted, at the beginning of August 1944, a decision was taken to exterminate the Gypsy camp. The terrible conditions into which the camp had deteriorated were, according to Höss's evidence, the reason. Between May and July 1944, the healthy Gypsy prisoners and finally the *ex-Wehrmacht* soldiers and their families had been transferred to Buchenwald, and to Ravensbrück (Zimmermann 1996: 339–44; Winter 1999: 68–70). Himmler himself might have been responsible for that selection, which saved the *ex-Wehrmacht* soldiers and their families from immediate extermination in the gas chambers. Their deportation to Buchenwald and Ravensbrück did not spare them from hard labor, in many instances from sterilization, and in the case of some, from ghastly medical experiments. Many died as a result of these and other crimes (Winter 1999: 70–2).

The 2,897 Gypsies who were left in Auschwitz, the sick, the old, and the children, were murdered in the gas chambers. The Gypsy camp was ear-

marked for the incarceration of Hungarian Jews, who were now arriving at Auschwitz by the hundreds of thousands. The need for extra camp space to help speed up the extermination of Hungarian Jewry apparently overrode Himmler's romantic aspiration to preserve the last of the German Gypsies. The Gypsy families' camp in Birkenau existed almost seventeen months. There are certain similarities between this camp and the families camp of the mostly Czech Jews who had been deported to Auschwitz from Theresienstadt that existed between September 1943 and July 1944. The lives of those Jews were also spared for some months, and they were not gassed immediately on arrival at Auschwitz. These Jewish families could remain together in the camp. Nevertheless, the correspondence between the International Red Cross and the office of Adolf Eichmann illuminates the motives for erecting this unique camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In view of a forthcoming visit of Red Cross official to Auschwitz the Nazi authorities wished to refute the rumors that had spread in Europe and in the world that the systematic extermination of the European Jews was taking place in this camp. Each of the two groups of the Theresienstadt Jews survived in Auschwitz exactly six months and then they were murdered in the gas chambers (Margalit 1999: 615). There is no evidence for similar motives for the erection of the Gypsy families camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

In the last two months of the war, a few hundred German Gypsies, former *Wehrmacht* soldiers who had been incarcerated in the concentration camps, were forcefully enlisted to Dirlewanger's unit. This unit was made up from the ranks of German prisoners (mainly the criminals, *Asoziale* and even some political prisoners). They were sent to the Russian front on the River Oder (Margalit 1998: 418; Winter 1999: 79–81). No German Jewish inmate of the camps was released in order to join this unit and fight the final battle of Nazi Germany against the Red Army. This might show that despite everything Himmler, who probably gave his consent to Dirlewanger's initiative, perceived the German Gypsies, in contrast to the Jews, as a part of the German fatherland, and not as a political foe.

Conclusion

Nazi policies regarding Gypsies considerably differed from the Nazi policy regarding Jews. The Gypsy image the Nazis had in mind lacked the political dimension which was so typical of their image of Jews. In the German Reich the Gypsy case was regarded as an integral part of German interior policy.

Hitler himself showed very little interest in it, and it was of lower priority than the Jewish case. This lower priority made possible a certain variety of positions regarding the Gypsies within the Nazi system. On the one hand, a dominant negative attitude existed, which stigmatized them as an anti-social element and aimed at radical solutions, envisioned by certain officials in the Reich Ministry of the Interior as early as 1935, to get rid of all German Gypsies in the long run by sterilization—this trend exerted much influence on the Gypsy policy in the Third Reich. Under the influence of the extermination of the Jews since 1941, sterilization was substituted with murder. On the other hand, a racist-romantic approach was adopted by a minority in the Nazi system, who tried to save at least a certain part (of the Sinti-German Gypsies, at least 4,000 people) and opposed the total annihilation of East European Roma. Although it reflected only a minority in the Third Reich it had played a major role, through Himmler, in the Gypsy policy of the Third Reich at least during the crucial years 1942–1943. Paradoxical as it may sound, the development of the persecution into genocide seemed to occur not as a direct decision of Hitler or Himmler but in spite of their wishes in December 1942, even though the fate of the Gypsies accorded with the murderous intentions of other figures in the Nazi system who had lower roles in this system. There was probably no order to the *Einsatzgruppen* to murder Gypsies in the German occupied territories of the Soviet Union, but because of the Gypsy image they had in mind the commanders of these units (especially Ohlendorf) included the killing of Gypsies as part of their mission. Similarly, the horrible fate of the inmates of the Gypsy camp at Birkenau was not envisaged by Himmler when he instructed his subordinates to incarcerate the Gypsies there. In spite of the orders, the inmates were treated so badly that only a minority survived the severe epidemics which broke out in the camp. This paradoxical development is, in my opinion, the main expression of the uniqueness of the Nazi persecution of the Gypsies. In this respect this persecution differed considerably from the persecution of the Jews, which was implemented according to the explicit instruction and will of Hitler and the Nazi leadership.

Notes

1. BA Koblenz R 6/34a fold. 1–82, Nr. 39: 2, 3 October 1941.
2. BA (Bundesarchiv) Berlin R73/14005 Der Chef der Sicherheitspolizei und des SD V an die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 12 December 1939.

3. StA Nuremberg NOKW-802: 26.10.1941.
4. BA Berlin R 73/ 13620 Robert Ritter Kurzbericht zu Hd. von Dr. Blome 19.6.1941.
5. For Ritter's BA Berlin R 73 14 005—Ritter's Arbeitsbericht 6 January 1940, p. 7.
6. IMG 1947 IV: 528–51.
7. Tsentr Khraneniya Istoriko-Dokumentalnykh Kollektzii (Special Archive), Moscow, R-1323–2–363: 93.
8. IfZ München-MA 3 (9/91) 3.12.1942.

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